

This Page Is Inserted by IFW Operations  
and is not a part of the Official Record

## **BEST AVAILABLE IMAGES**

Defective images within this document are accurate representations of the original documents submitted by the applicant.

Defects in the images may include (but are not limited to):

- BLACK BORDERS
- TEXT CUT OFF AT TOP, BOTTOM OR SIDES
- FADED TEXT
- ILLEGIBLE TEXT
- SKEWED/SLANTED IMAGES
- COLORED PHOTOS
- BLACK OR VERY BLACK AND WHITE DARK PHOTOS
- GRAY SCALE DOCUMENTS

**IMAGES ARE BEST AVAILABLE COPY.**

As rescanning documents *will not* correct images,  
please do not report the images to the  
Image Problem Mailbox.

**THIS PAGE BLANK (USPTO)**

(19)



Europäisches Patentamt

European Patent Office

Office européen des brevets



(11)

**EP 1 362 769 A1**

(12)

**EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION**

(43) Date of publication:

19.11.2003 Bulletin 2003/47

(51) Int Cl.7: **B62D 25/24, B62D 65/00**

(21) Application number: **03076399.9**

(22) Date of filing: **07.05.2003**

(84) Designated Contracting States:

**AT BE BG CH CY CZ DE DK EE ES FI FR GB GR  
HU IE IT LI LU MC NL PT RO SE SI SK TR**

Designated Extension States:

**AL LT LV MK**

(30) Priority: **17.05.2002 GB 0211268**

(71) Applicant: **L & L Products Inc.**

**Romeo, MI 48065 (US)**

(72) Inventors:

• **Mendiboure, Jean, Core Products**

**67129 Molsheim, Cedex (FR)**

• **Undereiner, Jean-Jacques, Core Products**

**67129 Molsheim, Cedex (FR)**

(74) Representative: **Bawden, Peter Charles**

**Bawden & Associates,**

**4 The Gatehouse**

**2 High Street**

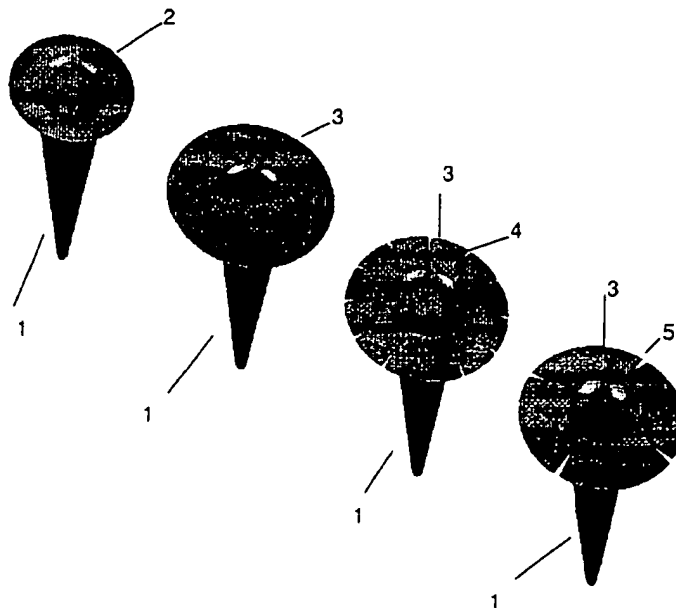
**Harpenden, Hertfordshire AL5 2TH (GB)**

(54) **Expandible conical hole plugs**

(57) Conical plugs are provided which are foamable and may be placed in incompletely filled holes in structures to prevent corrosion over time; preferably the

plugs are made of a foamable material which can be foamed in the e coat oven used in automobile manufacture.

**FIGURE 1**



## Description

[0001] The present invention relates to plugs for holes and in particular to plugs that may be used to block holes in the components of vehicles, ships, boats and aircraft during and after assembly and treatment.

[0002] During the manufacture of vehicles, ships, boats and aircraft components are used which may contain holes. Holes may also be provided in components, particularly structural components to enable assembly, to allow for drainage of fluids or allow for passage of cabling and the like. In many instances it is necessary to seal and/or close the holes after assembly to reduce the likelihood of subsequent corrosion. This is because in some instances the holes are not used in assembly, thus providing a location for potential corrosion. In other instances although material, such as cabling or tubing, passes through the holes the hole is not filled and the rim of the hole remains a location for potential corrosion, this may be the case when tubing is used to contain electrical wiring or when other tubes such as drainage tubes are present.

[0003] Currently the holes are either left open or are closed by forcing mastic into the holes, generally by hand. In the production of automobiles the mastic is generally applied after the automobile has been subject to the e coat anticorrosion process. In the e coat anticorrosion process the metal frame of the vehicle is passed through a bath of anticorrosion fluid and the anticorrosion material is deposited on the metal parts of the vehicle by an electrolysis process in which the metal frame of the vehicle is used as one of the electrodes. After the e coat process the vehicle is baked to dry and consolidate the anticorrosion coating. Subsequently the vehicle after assembly will be painted. It is important that the holes be filled prior to painting to minimise contamination due to the paint.

[0004] The use of manually applied mastic to fill the holes has the disadvantage that in order to ensure that the holes are sealed one generally uses an excess of the mastic. This is expensive and can also result in some mastic passing through the holes leading to contamination and extra weight in the vehicle, ship, boat or aircraft. There is also the possibility that overtime the mastic will degrade and/or fall away from the hole providing a site for potential corrosion.

[0005] The present invention provides a plug that overcomes these problems.

[0006] The present invention therefore provides a plug comprising a conical section extending from a base said conical section being made from an expandable material.

[0007] In a preferred embodiment the conical section is made from a flexible and expandable material. In a further preferred embodiment the conical section is hollow and the base material is circular.

[0008] The conical section enables the thinner part of the section to pass through the hole and a thicker part

can bear against the perimeter of the hole to hold the plug in place during processing. In a further embodiment the material of the base is also expandable and in the preferred embodiment the conical section and the base are integrally moulded from the expandable material and the material is preferably flexible. Alternatively the plugs may be made by extrusion.

[0009] In use the plug may be used as the sole means of closing the hole or it may be used as a support for a sealant, such as a mastic, thus reducing the amount of mastic required and ensuring that mastic does not pass through the hole, this in turn reduces waste and undesirable deposits. The hole may therefore be closed by placing the conical section of the plug through the hole and then subjecting the structure to conditions which cause the expandable material of the plug to foam and fill the hole. Optionally a layer of a sealant such as a mastic may be applied onto the side of the base section remote from the conical section. Any further sealant may be applied before or after the expandable material has been foamed.

[0010] The size of the plug may be chosen according to the size of the hole to be filled. However in the manufacture of automobiles the holes produced in the vehicle frame may be any shape, if they are circular they are typically 5 to 50 millimeters more typically 5 to 10 millimeters in diameter and accordingly the conical section is generally such that at least part of the conical section passes through the hole of this size. The base of the plug is preferably of a size that it will not pass through the hole. In this way the plug is prevented from passing through the hole. In some instances the plug may pass entirely into the hole. The plug may also be provided with an extension protruding from the base or the side opposite from the conical section to aid location in the hole and enable verification that a plug has been placed in the hole. This is particularly useful if the entire plug passes into the hole.

[0011] The flexibility of the base of the plug and the ease of installation may be increased by forming small incisions such as cuts around the perimeter of the base. In this way the flexibility of the conical section and the flexibility of the base can enable a single size of plug to be used with a variety of hole sizes. The incisions also reduce the resistance which can act to force the plug back out of the hole. The incisions or gaps in the base may also allow flow of fluid such as the e coat anticorrosion fluid through the hole. In addition the conical section of the plug may be shaped to allow flow of fluids such as the e coat fluid. For example the conical section may be provided with one or more vanes.

[0012] The use of the plug will now be described in relation to automobile manufacture wherein the automobile is subjected to the e coat anti-corrosion process. The vehicle sub frame is assembled in the normal manner and then plugs according to the present invention are inserted into any unused or incompletely filled holes in the vehicle sub frame. The vehicle sub frame is then

subjected to the electrocoat process. Following the electrocoat the sub frame is baked in a curing oven. The expandable material from which the plug is made is preferably selected so that it expands under the conditions employed in the curing oven. The expandable material therefore foams in the curing oven and fills the hole to effect a seal, the expansion is preferably such that the foamed material encapsulates the rim of the hole. Where the hole has little depth the expandable material may foam so that it encapsulates both sides of the hole so that the entire surface of the hole is provided with a protective layer. Where the hole is at the end of an elongated tube the expanded material may encapsulate only one rim. Subsequently, if desired, a sealant, such as mastic, may be applied to the surface of the expanded plug, which serves to retain the sealant and prevent it passing through the hole to ensure effective use of the sealant.

**[0013]** The plug is made of an expandable material so that it will expand to fill the hole. The material may also be such that, on expansion, it will bond to the interior wall of the structure. Accordingly, the plug may be made from an expandable adhesive material, which can be activated to expand (typically foam) and optionally to act as an adhesive. Accordingly the expandable adhesive must expand at the desired temperature and in a preferred embodiment be sufficiently adhesive to firmly bond to the component in which the hole is formed.

**[0014]** Prior to activation, the material or materials from which the plug is made is preferably dry and not tacky to the touch, since this facilitates shipping and handling and prevents contamination. The plug is preferably made of a flexible material and thermoplastic materials such as ethylene polymers and copolymers used as raw materials for acoustic baffles are preferred, preferred materials are copolymers of ethylene and vinyl acetate or ethylene acrylate copolymers.

**[0015]** The foamable material may also be chosen to also provide some rigidity and reinforcement to the overall structure. In this instance examples of other preferred foamable materials include foamable epoxy-base resins and examples of such materials are the products L5206, L5207, L5208 and L5209, which are commercially available from L & L Products of Rome Michigan USA, and the Core Products Core 5204, 5206, 5205 and 5208 available from Core Products, Strasbourg, France. The material should be chosen according to the rate of expansion and foam densities required where the plugs of the invention are used in automobile manufacture. It is further preferred that the material expand at the temperatures experienced in the electrocoat baking oven, typically 160°C to 180°C more typically 130°C to 150°C.

**[0016]** The plug may be made extrusion, stamping and die cutting, mini applicator or by injection moulding providing that the temperatures used in fabrication are below the temperatures at which the expandable material will foam.

**[0017]** Examples of uses of the plugs include the filling of holes formed in the A, B and/or C pillars or the rails

in the frames or chassis and engine supports of vehicles, the holes being formed for passage of cabling or tubing or for various attachments. Alternatively the plugs may be used to fill the ends of tubing such as the tubing used to reinforce vehicle doors against side or front impact.

**[0018]** The invention is illustrated by the accompanying drawings in which:

Figure 1 shows plugs according to the present invention.

Figure 2 shows two plugs according to the present invention inserted in holes in a vehicle component.

Figure 3 shows a component of a vehicle in which a hole has been filled by the foaming of a plug according to the present invention.

Figures 4 and 5 show the use of a plug according to the present invention to fill the hole in the end of a tube that is used for side reinforcement of automobile doors. Figure 4 shows the location of the reinforcing tube in the door and Figure 5 is an enlarged view of the end of the tube shown in Figure 4 the end being provided with a hole plug (prior to foaming).

Figures 6 and 7 show an alternate form of a plug of the invention.

Figure 8 shows the alternate form of plug shown in Figures 6 and 7 inserted in a hole.

**[0019]** Figure 1 shows four somewhat different plugs according to the present invention in each plug the conical Section (1) is the same but one plug is provided with a narrow circular base (2), the second plug is provided with a wider circular base (3). In the third plug the circular base (3) is provided with 12 slits (4) to enhance flexibility and in the fourth plug the base is provided with 4 larger slits (5) to enhance flexibility.

**[0020]** In Figure 2 the two plugs (6) are circled and shown inserted in holes in a vehicle door frame (7).

**[0021]** In Figure 3 a plug (8) in its foamed shape is shown blocking a hole in an automobile component (9).

**[0022]** Figure 4 shows the inside of a vehicle door (10) in which is mounted a tube (11) to provide protection against side and front impact, in the finished vehicle the tube will not be visible due to the presence of the door fascia.

**[0023]** Figure 5 is an expanded view of the portion of Figure 4 that contains the tube (11) and shows a plug (12) placed in hole at the end of tube (11). Figure 5 shows the system prior to expansion of the material of plug (12) but it is clear that when the material expands the material will adhere to and encapsulate the entire end of the tube (11) providing comprehensive protection

for the end of the tube.

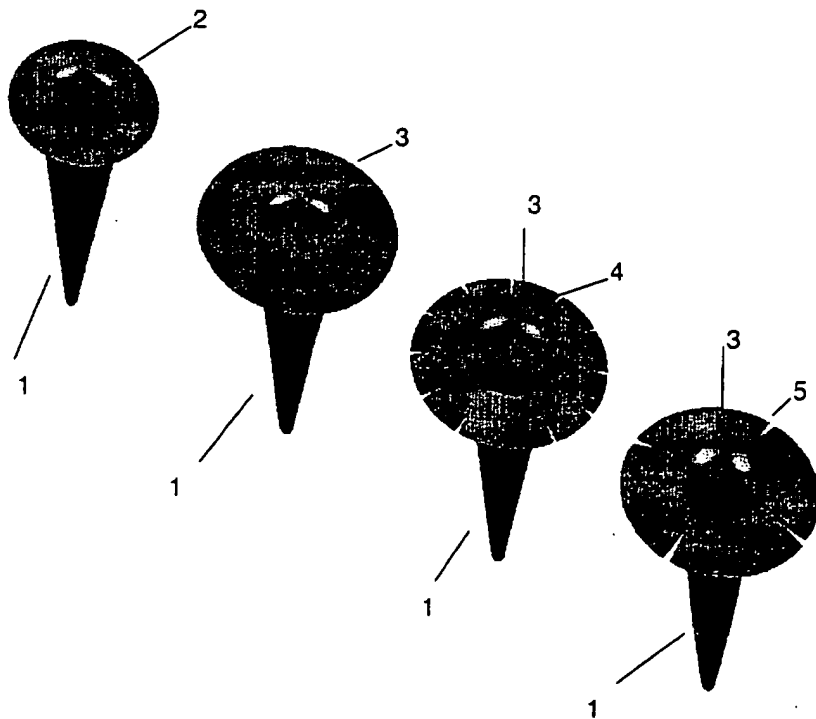
[0024] Figures 6 and 7 show a plug (13) in which the conical section (14) is provided with vanes (15) to provide channels for the flow of the e coat fluid prior to expansion. Incisions (16) are provided in the base section (17) to allow for flow of the e coat fluid. The plug is also provided with an extension (18) on the side remote from the conical section to enable location of the plug is a hole.

[0025] Figure 8 shows the plug of Figure 6 located in a hole (19).

# Claims

1. A plug comprising a conical section extending from a base said conical section being made from an expandable material. 15
2. A plug according to Claim 1 in which the conical section is made from a material that is flexible and expandable. 20
3. A plug according to Claim 1 or Claim 2 in which the conical section is hollow. 25
4. A plug according to any of the preceding Claims in which the base is circular.
5. A plug according to any of the preceding Claims in which the conical section and the base are integrally moulded from the expandable material. 30
6. A plug according to any of the preceding Claims in which the maximum diameter of the conical section is 5 to 50 millimeters. 35
7. A plug according to Claim 6 in which the maximum diameter of the conical section is 5 to 10 millimeters. 40
8. A plug according to any of the preceding Claims having incisions formed around the perimeter of the base.
9. A plug according to any of the preceding claims in which the conical section is provided with channels. 45
10. A plug according to Claim 9 in which the channels are defined by vanes formed on the conical section. 50
11. A plug according to any of the preceding claims provided with an extension on the side of the base remote from the conical section.
12. A plug according to any of the preceding Claims in which the expandable material is an expandable adhesive material, which can be activated to expand (typically foam) and also act as an adhesive. 55
13. The use of a plug according to any of the preceding Claims to fill holes in automobile frames.
14. The use of a plug according to any of the Claims 1 to 12 to fill the one or more holes in the end of tubing.
15. A process in relation to automobile manufacture wherein a vehicle sub frame is assembled and one or more plugs according to any of Claims 1 to 12 are inserted into unused or incompletely filled holes in the vehicle sub frame.
16. A process according to Claim 15 in which the vehicle sub frame in which the plugs have been inserted is subjected to the e coat process and following the e coat the sub frame is baked in a curing oven whereby the expandable material expands under the conditions in the curing oven.
17. A process for the provision of corrosion protection around a hole comprising filling the hole with protective material and encapsulating the perimeter of the hole at each surface of the hole with protective material wherein a plug having a conical section made of an expandable material and having a minimum diameter such that it will pass through the hole and a base of a size that will not pass through the hole is inserted into the hole and after insertion of the plug it is subjected to conditions whereby the expandable material expands to fill the hole and to encapsulate the perimeter of the hole at each surface of the hole.
18. A process according to Claim 17 in which the hole is an automobile component.
19. A process according to Claim 17 or Claim 18 in which the plug is inserted prior to subjecting the automobile component to the e coat process and subjecting the component to the e coat process whereby the expandable material expands under the conditions of the curing of the e coat.

FIGURE 1



**THIS PAGE BLANK (USPTO)**



FIGURE 2

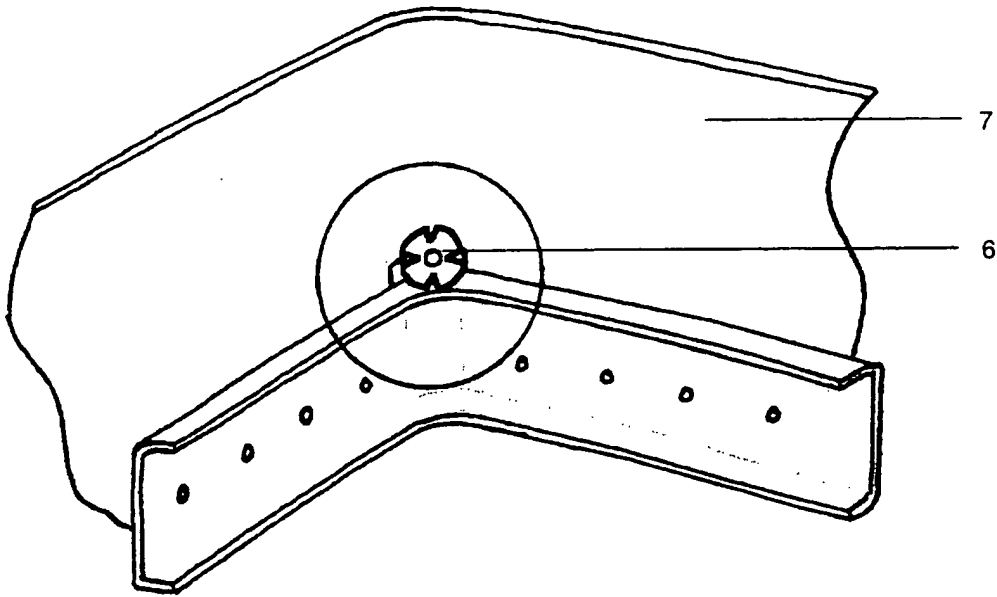
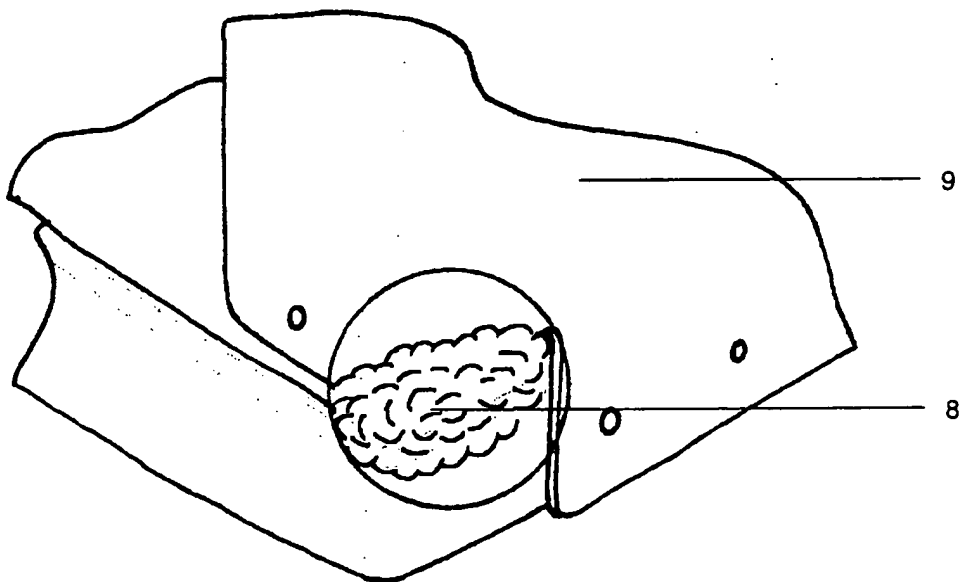


FIGURE 3



**THIS PAGE BLANK (USPTO)**

FIGURE 4

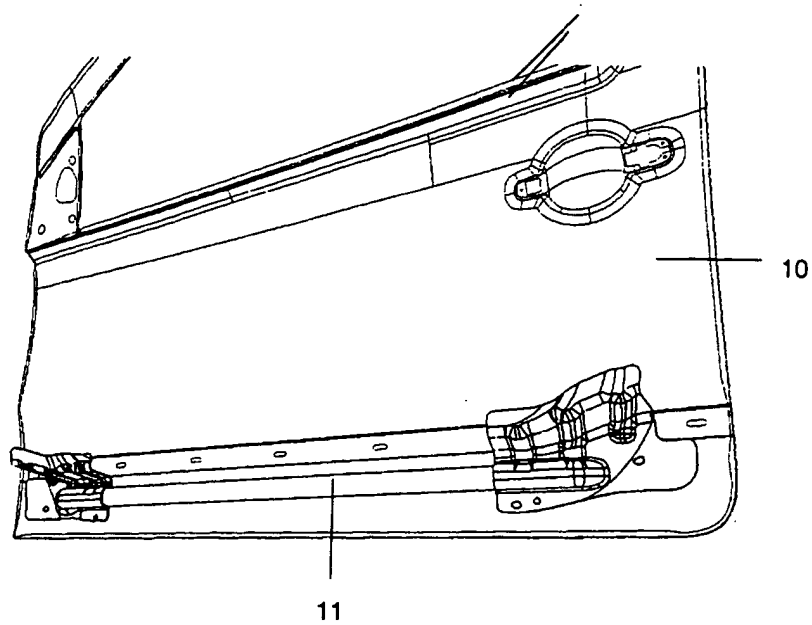
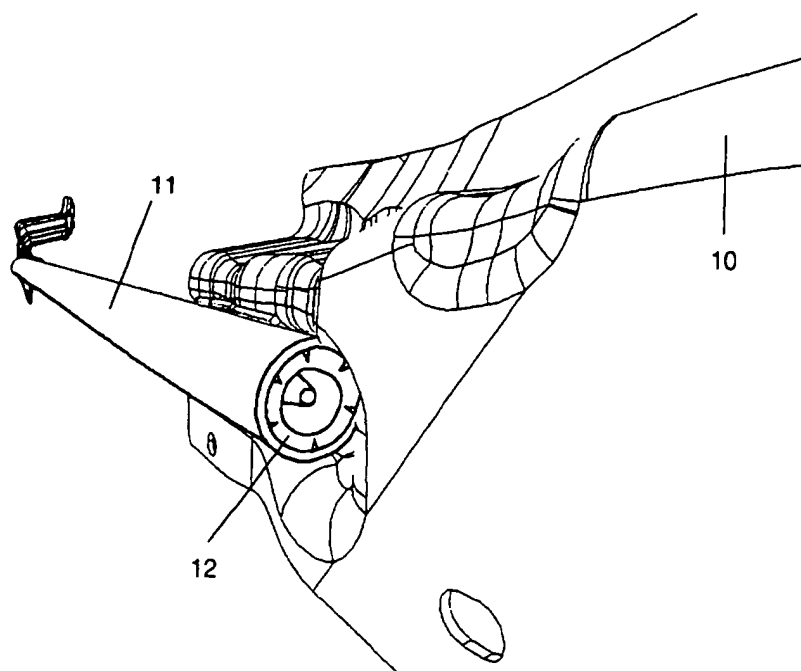


FIGURE 5



**THIS PAGE BLANK (USPTO)**

FIGURE 6

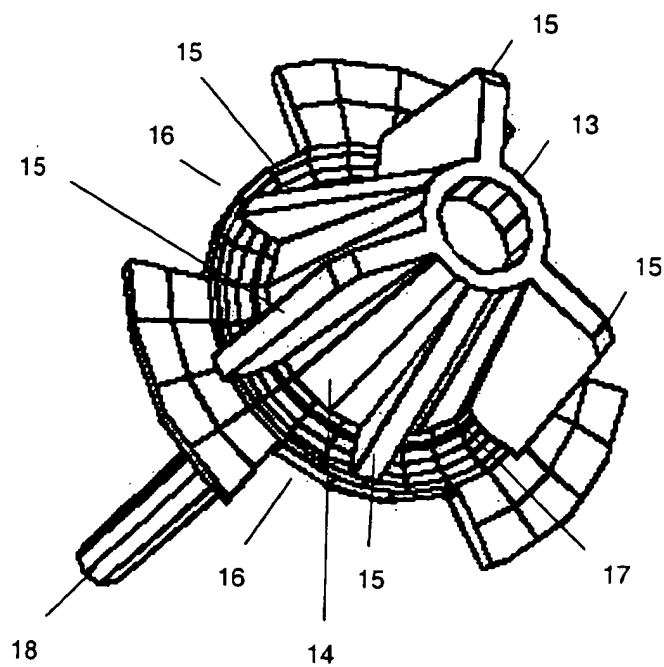
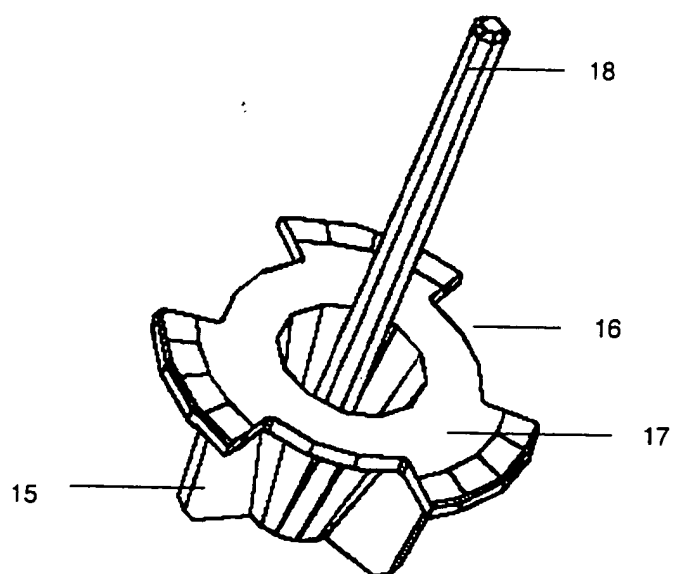
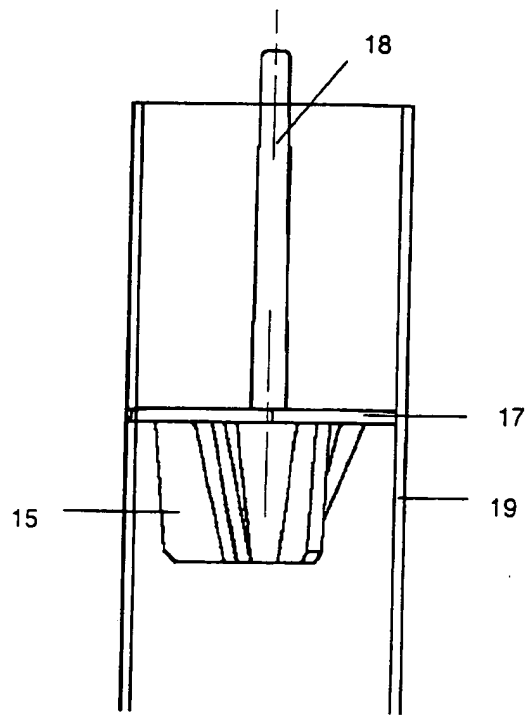


FIGURE 7



**THIS PAGE BLANK (USPTO)**

FIGURE 8



**THIS PAGE BLANK (USPTO)**





European Patent  
Office

# EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number  
EP 03 07 6399

DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT			
Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int.Cl.7)
X	US 5 829 482 A (TAKABATAKE YOSHIHIRO) 3 November 1998 (1998-11-03)  * figures 1-5 * * column 3, line 8 - column 4, line 45 *	1-5, 9, 12, 13, 17-19	B62D25/24 B62D65/00
A	---	15, 16	
X	EP 0 834 442 A (UNITED CARR GMBH TRW) 8 April 1998 (1998-04-08) * claims 1-3; figures 1, 2, 4 * * column 3, line 19 - column 4, line 17 *	1, 4, 5, 13	
A	---	2, 15-19	
X	WO 00 05320 A (LEON JEAN PIERRE RENE ;PIERROT JEAN MICHEL (FR); RAPID SA (FR); VI) 3 February 2000 (2000-02-03) * page 48, line 15 - page 48, line 27 * * page 12, line 9 - page 14, line 18 *	1, 2, 12, 13	
A	---	17-19	
A, P	PATENT ABSTRACTS OF JAPAN vol. 2003, no. 03, 5 May 2003 (2003-05-05) & JP 2002 331960 A (NEOEX LAB INC), 19 November 2002 (2002-11-19) * abstract *	14	TECHNICAL FIELDS SEARCHED (Int.Cl.7)  B62D
The present search report has been drawn up for all claims			
Place of search <b>THE HAGUE</b>		Date of completion of the search <b>1 August 2003</b>	Examiner <b>Deraymaeker, D</b>
<p><b>CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS</b></p> <p>X: particularly relevant if taken alone Y: particularly relevant if combined with another document of the same category A: technological background O: non-written disclosure P: intermediate document</p> <p>T: theory or principle underlying the invention E: earlier patent document, but published on, or after the filing date D: document cited in the application L: document cited for other reasons &amp; : member of the same patent family, corresponding document</p>			

EPO FORM 1503 03 82 (P04001)

**ANNEX TO THE EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT  
ON EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION NO.**

EP 03 07 6399

This annex lists the patent family members relating to the patent documents cited in the above-mentioned European search report. The members are as contained in the European Patent Office EDP file on  
The European Patent Office is in no way liable for these particulars which are merely given for the purpose of information.

01-08-2003

Patent document cited in search report	Publication date	Patent family member(s)	Publication date
US 5829482 A	03-11-1998	JP 3376180 B2	10-02-2003
		JP 9047719 A	18-02-1997
EP 0834442 A	08-04-1998	DE 19640835 A1	09-04-1998
		DE 59705754 D1	24-01-2002
		EP 0834442 A2	08-04-1998
		ES 2167659 T3	16-05-2002
		US 5937486 A	17-08-1999
WO 0005320 A	03-02-2000	FR 2781496 A1	28-01-2000
		AT 235543 T	15-04-2003
		BR 9912295 A	17-04-2001
		CN 1315990 T	03-10-2001
		DE 69906329 D1	30-04-2003
		EP 1114113 A1	11-07-2001
		WO 0005320 A1	03-02-2000
		JP 2002521521 T	16-07-2002
		US 6562477 B1	13-05-2003
JP 2002331960 A	19-11-2002	NONE	

EPOFORM P459

For more details about this annex : see Official Journal of the European Patent Office, No. 12/82

# Empfangsbescheinigung / Receipt for documents / Récépissé de documents 6

(Liste der diesem Antrag beigelegten Unterlagen) (Checklist of enclosed documents) (Liste des documents annexés à la présente requête)  
Es wird hiermit der Empfang der unten bezeichneten Dokumente bescheinigt / Receipt of the documents indicated below is hereby acknowledged / Nous attestons le dépôt des documents désignés ci-dessous

Wird im Falle der Einreichung der europäischen Patentanmeldung bei einer nationalen Behörde diese Empfangsbescheinigung vom Europäischen Patentamt übersandt, so ist sie als Mitteilung gemäß Regel 24(4) anzusehen (siehe Feld RENA). Nach Erhalt der Mitteilung nach Regel 24(4) sind alle weiteren Unterlagen, die die Anmeldung betreffen, nur noch unmittelbar beim EPA einzureichen. / If this receipt is issued by the European Patent Office and the European patent application was filed with a national authority it serves as a communication under Rule 24(4) (see Section RENA). Once the communication under Rule 24(4) has been received, all further documents relating to the application must be sent directly to the European Patent Office. / Si, en cas de dépôt de la demande de brevet européen auprès d'un service national, l'Office européen des brevets délivre le présent récépissé de documents, ce récépissé est réputé être la notification visée à la règle 24(4) (cf. rubrique RENA). Dès que la notification visée à la règle 24(4) a été reçue, tous les autres documents relatifs à la demande doivent être adressés directement à l'OEB.

Bawden & Associates  
4 The Gatehouse, 2 High Street  
HARPENDEN  
Herts, AL5 2TH  
GB

Nur für amtlichen Gebrauch / For official use only / Cadre réservé à l'administration

Datum / Date  
25. 11. 2003

Unterschrift / Amtsstempel / Signature / Official stamp / Signature / Cachet officiel



Anmeldenummer / Application No. / N° de la demande		03078631.8	
Tag des Eingangs (Regel 24(2)) / Date of receipt (Rule 24(2)) / Date de réception (règle 24(2))	DREC	19. 11. 2003	
Zeichen des Anmelders/Vertreters / Applicant's/ Representative's ref. / Référence du demandeur ou du mandataire	AREF		

Nur nach Einreichung der Anmeldung bei einer nationalen Behörde: / Only after filing of the application with a national authority: / Seulement après le dépôt de la demande auprès d'un service national:

Tag des Eingangs beim EPA (Regel 24(4)) / Date of receipt at EPO (Rule 24(4)) / Date de réception à l'OEB (règle 24(4))	RENA	
---	------	--

A. Anmeldeunterlagen und Prioritätsbeleg(e) / Application documents and priority document(s) / Pièces de la demande et document(s) de priorité	47	Blattzahl* / Number of sheets* / Nombre de feuilles*	Gesamtzahl der Abbildungen* / Total number of figures* / Nombre total de figures*
1. Beschreibung (ohne Sequenzprotokollteil) / Description (excluding sequence listing part) / Description (sauf partie réservée au listing des séquences)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	27	
2. Patentansprüche / Claim(s) / Revendication(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6	
3. Zeichnung(en) / Drawing(s) / Dessin(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	10	10
4. Sequenzprotokollteil der Beschreibung / Sequence listing part of description / Partie de la description réservée au listing des séquences	<input type="checkbox"/>		
5. Zusammenfassung / Abstract / Abrégé	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	
6. Übersetzung der Anmeldeunterlagen / Translation of the application documents / Traduction des pièces de la demande	<input type="checkbox"/>		
7. Prioritätsbeleg(e) / Priority document(s) / Document(s) de priorité	<input type="checkbox"/>		
8. Übersetzung des (der) Prioritätsbeleg(s) / Translation of priority document(s) / Traduction du (des) document(s) de priorité	<input type="checkbox"/>		
* Die Richtigkeit der Angabe der Blattzahl und der Gesamtzahl der Abbildungen wurde bei Eingang nicht geprüft / No check was made on receipt that the number of sheets and the total number of figures indicated were correct / L'exactitude du nombre de feuilles et du nombre total de figures n'a pas été contrôlée lors du dépôt			
B. Der Anmeldung in der eingereichten Fassung liegen folgende Unterlagen bei: / This application as filed is accompanied by the items below: / A la présente demande sont annexées les pièces suivantes:			
1. Einzelvollmacht / Specific authorisation / Pouvoir particulier	<input type="checkbox"/>		
2. Allgemeine Vollmacht / General authorisation / Pouvoir général	<input type="checkbox"/>		
3. Erfindernennung / Designation of inventor / Désignation de l'inventeur	<input type="checkbox"/>		
4. Früherer Recherchenbericht / Earlier search report / Rapport de recherche antérieure	<input type="checkbox"/>		
5. Gebührenzahlungsverdruck (EPA Form 1010) / Voucher for the settlement of fees (EPO Form 1010) / Bordereau de règlement de taxes (OEB Form 1010)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
6. Scheck / Check / Chèque (nur wenn eingereicht bei den nationalen Behörden) / Cheque (only when filing with national authorities) / Chèque (pas de chèque en cas de dépôt auprès des services nationaux)	<input type="checkbox"/>		
7. Datenträger für Sequenzprotokoll / Data carrier for sequence listing / Support de données pour liste de séquences	<input type="checkbox"/>		
8. Zusatzblatt / Additional sheet / Feuille additionnelle	<input type="checkbox"/>		
9. Sonstige Unterlagen (bitte hier spezifizieren) / Other documents (please specify here) / Autres documents (préciser préciser)	<input type="checkbox"/>		
C. Kopien dieser Empfangsbescheinigung / Copies of this receipt for documents / Copies du présent récépissé de documents			
	49	3	Anzahl der Kopien / Number of copies / Nombre de copies

**ZUR KASSE**

Währung Betrag / Currency Amount / Monnaie Montant  
(Ausfüllung freigestellt / optional / facultatif)  
EUR 3230.00

**THIS PAGE BLANK (USPTO)**

2024-5-15